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EMERSONIAN MYSTICISM AND ITS SOURCES

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THESIS

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CONTENTS

Introduction

I. Indian Sources

II. Platonic and Neo-Platonic Sources

III. Coleridgian Sources

IV. Emerson's Philosophical Mysticism

Bibliography

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The reputation of Ralph Waldo Emerson in the past has rested mainly upon his contribution as a man of letters. When certain of his writings are examined, however, it becomes obvious that he was a mystic. The wide range of materials at his command and the intellectual insight with which he treats them entitles him to a place among the philosophers. In his writings he alludes to the philosophical mysticism of the Orient, Neo-Platonism and subsequent writers. The purpose of this thesis will be to examine these sources of philosophical mysticism; especially as they are reflected in the writings of Emerson. Furthermore, there will be an evaluation of Emerson's position, in order to determine the originality of his work and the extent to which he was influenced by the sources he used in his studies.

In order to understand what is meant by philosophical mysticism a brief consideration of the subject will be taken up at this point. There have been numerous books and articles written about mysticism during the past few years. Research in the history and psychology of religion has brought to light many facts enabling scholars to arrive at a more complete understanding of mysticism.

By virtue of its nature, mysticism has suffered great harm, especially when one attempts a definition. It would perhaps be better to approach the subject in a more general way before any effort is made to arrive at any sort of a definition. "Mysticism is implicit in human experience and in all religion the mystical element is present." (1)

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(1) Buckham, John Wright, Lectures on Mysticism in the course The Philosophy and Psychology of Religion, First Semester, 1935-1936.

At the outset it will be noted that mysticism is definitely related to religion as experience and that it is not a mystery setting one apart from others. It is held by some that mysticism is but a certain manifestation of a pathological condition. In that case the mystic would be classified as "abnormal;" however, the lives of many of the outstanding mystics would seem to contradict such a classification. Doubtless many pathological cases show distinct evidence of a tendency toward mysticism, but it does not prove that mysticism is the cause of the disease. If anything, mysticism may serve as part of the treatment for restoring the patient to normal health. In other words, the psychopathic case is one who has allowed his problems to master him, whereas the mystic has utilized his inner resources to master his problems. Mystics have been accused of being idealistic and impractical, but again an examination of the lives of the great mystics introduces us to many who have enriched the world's culture by literature, constructive humanitarian reforms, social service and the reaffirmation and restatement of truth. There appears to be no standard or test with which to judge a mystic, nor is it given to a certain type of temperament. Some have followed the mystic way and were in excellent health, while others were always delicate. They have appeared in all walks of life--from the rulers of empires even to the simple husbandman, remote from the society of his fellow men.

It isn't necessary to follow any certain form or way to live the life of a mystic. Some have turned to nature and found there a deeper meaning in life. Some have taken up the mystic way

in the sense of communion with a person or God. Again the practical activities and the daily routine of living bring many into the way of a mystical experience. Still others have taken their place in the uncounted throng by way of the mystical contemplation of truth. There are other forms or combinations of these mentioned, all of them having their advantages and limitations.

The discovery that mysticism is a common experience, that it takes various forms, and that it teaches valuable lessons, in spite of its limitations, gives certain definite helps toward a definition. The consideration of any subject, where human experience is involved, seems to leave out some element or inadequately interpret portions of its complex nature. Since mysticism springs out of human experience, and sometimes in the form of an intensified or climactic experience, it is necessary to take precautions in order to do justice to both humanity and the subject. Dr. Buckham defines the subject thus, "Mysticism is the certainty that grows up in the presence of mystery. It is religion resting upon inner experience--the obverse side of mystery."(2) In this brief but searching definition three things stand out as being important. First, something is known; secondly, it is known from within; thirdly, it is identified with religion insofar as it comes as an inner experience.

The definition in Funk and Wagnall's New Standard Dictionary of the English Language is as follows:

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(2) Bukcham, John Wright, Mysticism and Modern Life. Abingdon Press, New York, 1915.

> The doctrine and belief that man may attain, through contemplation and love, to an immediate, direct consciousness or intuition of God, as the real and absolute principle of all truth, and of all essential divine truth in Him. The term is applied to a system of thought and life of which the chief feature is an extreme development of meditative and intuitive methods, as distinguished from the definitive and scholastic. It dominated the philosophy of ancient Egypt, of China, and of the Vedas; it took a large place in Plato's system and colored the teaching of St. John's Gospel; with Augustine it became a question of rational knowledge; in the teaching of Scotus Erigena savored of pantheism; in the 12th Century it was systematized in a Christian sense by Hugh of St. Victor....
> Protestant mysticism is represented by Sebastian Frank (1499-1542), Werler (1533-1588), and Jacob Boehme (1575-1624), who identified the divine nature with the human soul...Mysticism takes different forms as it maintains that truth is gained, (1) by a mode of faith or intuition, as held by Coleridge, Thomas Taylor and Bronson Alcott, and others; (2) by a fixed supernatural channel, as the Bible, the Church, or the sacraments; (3) by an extraordinary supernatural means, as by the immediate action of God upon the mind, as maintained by Jacob Boehme, and the Friends, etc., who in this respect follow the Quietists. (3)

This might be termed an historical definition in view of the fact that it traces mysticism from ancient sources to recent times. It is also to the point because of the emphasis upon the theological aspect of mysticism. Another point in its favor is the manner in which mysticism is related to philosophy.

> Mysticism does indeed assert that after our best intellectual efforts there remains an element of mystery in reality; in this respect, mysticism is more allied to scepticism

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(3) Funk and Wagnalls New Standard Dictionary of the English Language.

> or agnosticism than to credulity. But the mystic, in the history of philosophy, is the initiate, one who has attained a direct vision of reality, a vision which he is unable to describe.(4)

Here mysticism is defined as related to the intellectual efforts of man as he seeks to know reality. The central point is that mysticism takes up where the intellectual process leaves off and endeavors to find a higher or more complete vision of reality.

The philosophical basis of mysticism is idealistic-intuitionalism. However, mysticism is more than intuitionalism. It is more than a way of arriving at knowledge; included with it is a metaphysical doctrine and a way of life. This particular type of mysticism is known as speculative or philosophical mysticism. The mystic comes to know by way of the mystical contemplation of the truth. Platonic mysticism is the chief embodiment and serves as the best example of this type. The method of reaching truth is the reliance upon intuition. The truth is put at a distance and the mystic seeks to know it by beholding instead of by communion. The dialectic is not absent, rather it is used for the attainment of the verification of truth. The personal realization of truth is subordinated to abstraction and speculation. The speculative type of mysticism passed from Platonism to the school of Neoplatonism, largely through Dionysius and Erigena. This influence made a strong impression on the subsequent history of speculative mysticism. Its representatives in modern philosophy are thinkers like Spinoza and

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(4) Hocking, William Ernest, Types of Philosophy, Charles Scribners Sons, San Francisco, 1929, p. 381.

Emerson. "Its tendency has been to pass out of the mystical into the rationalistic atmosphere. Yet it has always avoided pure rationalism."(5)

Dr. Hocking's excellent summary of philosophical mysticism is important because it consummates the findings of modern thought. Besides, it will be of value in serving as a guide for the treatment of the materials in this thesis.

(1) That reality is One, an absolute unity, as against all atomic or pluralistic metaphysical doctrines;
(2) That reality is ineffable (indescribable); whence, all the predicates or descriptives which apply to it are somehow in need of correction,--including the predicates which now follow:
(3) That reality (as we seek it in the world outside ourselves) is identical with the equally indescribable essence of the human self,--we may find reality, therefore, either looking without or by looking within, and what we find in either case is the same, not merely alike in kind, but identically the same thing; the extremes coincide;
(4) That it is possible (and vitally important) to reach an intuitive knowledge of, or union with, this absolute One;
(5) That the way to achieve this is by an effort which is primarily moral rather than theoretical. (6)

The process of definition, while making mention of the various forms of mysticism, has gradually moved toward, and arrived at philosophical mysticism. In view of the fact that this is an intellectual age, it seems reasonable to suppose that any mysticism which can serve humanity must be able to conform to critical examina-

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(5) Buckham, op. cit, pp. 151-152
(6) Hocking, op. cit. pp. 384-385.

tion. Of the various forms, philosophial or speculative mysticism is undoubtedly the most likely to face and withstand criticism.

CHAPTER I

INDIAN SOURCES

I.

Indian Sources

> In one half verse I shall tell you what
> has been taught in thousands of volumes:
> Brahman is true, the world is false, the
> soul is Brahman and nothing else.*

India is the home of some of the oldest and profoundest spiritual truths known to the world. These truths were formulated and expressed in the sacred writings of India when the new world was unknown, and the inhabitants of Europe were for the most part barbarians. The passing of the centuries has brought the civilizations of the Orient and the Occident into an intimate contact. One of the results of that contact has been the influence of Indian philosophy upon Western thought. In order to understand the philosophical teachings of India a brief history of some of the more important concepts will be outlined. The later hymns of the Rig Veda, written sometime after 1250 B.C., contain the early Aryan philosophical concepts dealing with the world's origin and the eternal principle which creates and maintains the world. The ideas are expressed in obscure phraseology, and in unclear, self-contradictory trains of thought. The pre-Buddhistic Upanishads contain the doctrines of the Divine Unity, the transmigration of souls, and the theory connected therewith of the subsequent effect of actions (karman). This doctrine has determined the whole direction of subsequent Indian philosophy. Salvation from ignorance is found, by every philosophical school of India, in some

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*Quoted by Max Muller in The Vedanta Philosophy

special form of cognition.

> The idea is this, that life, in quality as well as quantity, is precisely meted, absolutely appropriate expiation of the deeds of the previous existence. This expiation is accompanied by bhoktritvam and kartritvam (enjoying and acting), where the latter again is converted into works which must be expiated afresh in a subsequent existence, so that the clock work of atonement in running down always winds itself up again; and this unto all eternity--unless the universal knowledge appears which...does not rest on merit but breaks into life without connection with it, to dissolve it in its innermost elements, to burn up the seeds of works, and thus to make impossible for all future time a continuance of the transmigration. (1)

The ideas expounded by Deussen are the fundamentals of the six orthodox systems of Indian philosophy, of Buddhism and of Jainism.

The most important theme of the early Upanishads, written about 600 B.C., standing at the head of the real philosophical literature of India, is the doctrine of the Atman or Brahman. Atman was at first the "breath" or "breathing." Then it underwent a series of developing concepts to mean "the vital principle," "the self," and at last became the word to signify the Intransient ONE, without any attribute or quality--the All-Soul, the Soul of the World, the Thing-in-itself, or whatever one prefers to translate it. Brahman, originally "the prayer," became a term for the power which is inherent in every prayer and holy

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(1) Deussen, Das System des Vedanta, pp. 381-82

action, and at last for the eternal boundless power which is the basis of everything existing. At this stage of development Brahman became synonymous with Atman.

In the highest metaphysical idea these reflections culminate in one point: the innermost self of the individual being is one with that all-pervading power (tat tvam asi, "Thou art That.")

The Uttara-(Brahma)-Mimamsa, "the second," or "the inquiry into Brahman," most commonly called Vedanta, bears the same relation to the earlier Upanishads that Christian dogmatics bears to the New Testament. Its founder, Badarayana, accepted and further developed the doctrines of the Brahman-Atman into the system which to the present day determines the world-view of Indian thinkers. The two forms of the Vedanta philosophy are as follows:

1. The unsystematic form, a kind of native growth in the Upanishads.
2. The carefully elaborated, fully systematized form in the Vedanta Sutras ascribed to Badarayana.

The Sutras are not books in our sense, but headings containing the quintessence of the Vedanta philosophy. There was probably oral teaching along with them. About 800 A.D. Sankara prepared a commentary on the teachings. It is called Bhashya on the Sutras. It is really a body of Vedanta doctrine to which the Sutras are an index.

The date of the Vedanta is much in dispute. We know that it is the mother philosophy of India and that it is the living philosophy there today. It is more than 2000 years old, and considered

by some writers as being 3000 years old. After all, the importance of this literature, or any literature, and more particularly the importance of its philosophical position is quite independent of age. The chief interest in philosophy is not its age but its truth.

The aim of the Vedanta is the destruction of innate error. The object is to show that we have really nothing to conquer but ourselves, that we possess everything within us, and that nothing is required but to shut our eyes and our hearts against the illusion of the world in order to find ourselves richer than heaven and earth. Sankara says that object and subject, which fall under the perception of the Ego and Non-Ego, in their very essence appear to be opposed to each other like darkness and light, and the one cannot take the place of the other. It follows all the more that their attributes cannot be exchanged. The transfer of that which is objective to that which is subjective, or vice versa, is altogether wrong. A subject can never be anything but a subject and the object always remains the object. By subject Sankara means that which is truly real, in fact the Self, whether divine or human. Objective means the phenomenal and unreal, such as the body with its organs and the whole visible world. If the Indian philosopher is clear on any point it is this, that the subjective soul, the witness or knower, or the Self, can never be known as objective, but can be only itself and thus be curious of itself. Perception, memory, conception and effort--all this according to the Vedantist--are outside the self, and even in their most perfect and sublime manifestations are nothing but the veil through which the eternal

self looks at the world. Of the self behind the veil we know nothing beyond the fact that it is, and this too we know in a way different from all other knowledge. We know by being it, just as the sun may be said to shine by its own light and by that light to lighten the whole world. True immortality consists simply and entirely in the self knowing itself. How can the soul know the soul? He only can be the knower whose very being is knowing and whose knowing is being. As long as we live we dream, and our dream is real as long as we dream, but when we awake and our eyes are opened by knowledge, a new world, a new reality rises before us which before we knew only as shadows. This does not mean that the phenomenal world is altogether nothing;--no, it is always the effect of which Brahman, the source of all reality, is the cause. According to the Vedanta there can be no substantial difference between cause and effect. The phenomenal world is substantially as real as Brahman, nay is, in its ultimate reality, Brahman. There is only one Brahman, nothing could exist beside it. According to definition it is the unlimited, "without a second."

The Self, in Sanskrit, is Atman rather than Ego. The qualities making up our character have nothing to do with Self, according to the Vedantist. Brahman is called "Parama-Atman," the Highest Self, the "Over Soul," while the self in man is called Giva-Atman, for a time the living or embodied self. The individual self must in its absolute reality be that which is the All in All, the One without a Second; namely, Brahman, or the "Over Soul." Brahman is eternal, omnipotent and omnipresent but the individual

selves are not because they are conditioned, fettered and under obstructions. Upon becoming conscious of these fetters or obstructions it is one's desire to seek freedom or liberation. The fetters are due to ignorance--a universal power, independent of reality and assumed to account for the otherwise inexplicable production of the unreal world. When the human self has been once known as the same as the Eternal Self, there is no longer any possibility of transmigration, there is only peace and rest in Brahman.

By way of summary Indian philosophy might be briefly outlined as follows:

1. Brahman, the impersonal Reality as the pantheistic ALL.
2. Maya, the illusion of the unreal phenomenal world.
3. Karma and Transmigration, the explanation of the world.
4. Ultimate release from Transmigration and union with the one Reality.

At an early age Emerson became acquainted with the Brahmanic literature. His first contact with these writings was through the influence of his aunt, Mary Moody Emerson. As the years went by he continued reading Indian literature, always finding in it something of encouragement and inspiration. Christy writes:

> He turned to them as a religious psychologist, not as a metaphysician. This use of the cardinal doctrines of the Vedanta as an expression of his own beliefs is the most interesting feature of Emerson's Orientalism. And the first and

> most obvious parallel is that of Brahma and the Over-Soul.(2)

It is evident after careful examination that in the poem Brahma and the essay Over-Soul Emerson reaches the climax of his power as a writer and spiritual teacher. The choice of such a term as Over-Soul indicates something of the attraction Oriental thought had for him. The thought of the One in the many, of the Infinite revealed in the finite, is expressed with more power and beauty in the writings of India than anywhere else.

> In all nations there are minds which incline to dwell in the conception of the fundamental unity. The rapture of prayer and ecstacy finds its highest expression in the religious writings of the East, and chiefly in the Indian Scriptures, in the Bhagavad Gita, in the Vedas and the Vishnu Purana. These writings contain little else than this idea, and they rise to pure and sublime strains in celebrating it.(3)

In the poetry also of Emerson one finds evidence of borrowed figures and models of paraphrase. The poem Brahma is, of course, the outstanding instance. No single poem ever mystified its readers more. Probably no poem ever will. For a long time it doubtless will remain an enigma to Western minds. Oliver Wendell Holmes writes of it as "the nearest approach to a Torricellian vacuum of intelligibility that language can pump out of itself."(4)

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(2) Christy, A.C., The Orient in American Transcendentalism, pp.73-74
(3) Emerson, Essay Books, cf. Maitra, H., Emerson From an Indian Point of View, Harvard Theological Review, Vol.IV, No. 4
(4) Holmes, O.W., Emerson, p. 396

Emerson's Oriental interests are crystallized in the poem.

If the red slayer thinks he slays,
    Or if the slain thinks he is slain,
They know not well the subtle ways
    I keep, and pass, and turn again.

Far or forgot to me is near;
    Shadow and sunlight are the same;
The vanished gods to me appear;
    And one to me are shame and fame.

They reckon ill who leave me out;
    When me they fly, I am the wings;
I am the doubter and the doubt,
    And I am the Hymn the Brahmin sings.

The strong gods pine for my abode,
    And pine in vain the sacred Seven;
But thou, meek lover of the good!
    Find me and turn thy back on heaven.

The central philosophy of the poem appears at first in the Journal of 1830, "Thought and the object of thought are but one."(5) During these years Emerson had been reading extensively in Indian writings, more particularly in the Vishnu Purana. In his notebook he paraphrased an extract which reads as follows: "What living creature slays or is slain? What living creature preserves or is preserved? Each is his own destroyer or preserver as he follows good or evil."(6) Later this passage was put into verse:

What creature slayeth or is slain?
What creature saves or saved is?
His life will either lose or gain
And he shall follow harm or bliss.

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(5) Emerson, Journals II, p. 343
(6) Emerson, Works, IX, p. 465

It can rightly be said that the theme of Brahma is found in all Indian literature. It is not wrong to say that the roots of its idealism are in the Rig Veda. The Katha Upanishad contains a stanza which reappears in the Bhagavad Gita. Emerson inherited a copy of the Bibliotheca Indica, published in Calcutta in 1853, and the Katha Upanishad as rendered by E. Roer appears in that volume. The stanza in question, according to the Roer rendering, reads as follows:

> If the slayer thinks I slay, if the slain
> thinks I am slain, then both of them do
> not know well. It (the soul) does not slay,
> nor is it slain. (7)

This passage is so nearly identical with the opening stanza of Brahma that one no longer doubts the exact source of the literary figure and philosophical doctrine. There are other interesting identifications of Indian doctrines and deities in passages of the poem. Dr. Harris finds the "strong gods" of the final stanza in Indra, the god of the sky and fire, the wielder of the thunderbolt; and Yama, the god of death and judgment. The "sacred Seven" are the seven Maharishis or highest saints. "The seven Maharishis...were born of my mind, and from them these inhabitants of the world are sprung."(8) Finally, the concluding line of the poem, "find me and turn thy back on heaven," is suggested by the Bhagavad Gita. In the Gita a passage reads: "The high-souled ones, who achieve the highest perfection, attaining to me, do not come again to life...All worlds,

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(7) Katha Upanishad, II, 19
(8) Harris, W.T., The Genius and Character of Emerson, p. 373

O Arjuna! Up to the world of Brahman are destined to return. But... after attaining to me, there is no birth again." (9)

The publishers pled with Emerson to omit Brahma from Selected Poems, published in 1876, because of the ridicule it had received. He insisted that it be retained. This may suggest something of his attraction to Indian philosophy. It can be truthfully said that in this poem Emerson transmuted and presented that which he believed to be the heart of the Vedanta philosophy. In it he had found passages which were the reverberations of his own thoughts.

> "The poem Brahma may well be considered the high water mark of that flood of Orientalism which inundated Concord during the second quarter of the last century and baffled the practical Yankee villagers."(10)

The poem Hamatreya is almost as important as Brahma. It, too, is based on flashes of thought taken from Indian literature and the lines are directly modeled on the style of the Vishnu Purana. The Yankee farmers are necessary to the thought, illustrating the main idea, that "the words I and mine constitute ignorance."

The use of Oriental thought forms and literary style is not confined to the poems Brahma and Hamatreya. When Emerson's writings are examined they seem to be saturated with Orientalism.

> It tinged his philosophy, lent beauty to his prose, afforded undulated images to many of his verses, and models for entire poems. There is never a surety that the startling image which so springs the reader's imagination may not be a conscious adaptation for Emerson's own purpose of a Hindu image.(11)

(9) Bhagavad Gita, VIII, 15-16
(10) Christy, op.cit., p. 170
(11) Ibid. p. 179

In connection with this discussion of Oriental thought the "doctrine" of the Over-Soul should receive some consideration. It has been pointed out that the word is a translation of the Sanskrit term but in Emerson's concept it means more than the Vedanta included in the doctrine. In subsequent chapters it will be indicated that the mysticism of Plotinus and later European sources influenced Emerson's thinking. In brief, the difference of the Emersonian doctrine from the Vedanta doctrine rests upon the attitude toward the phenomenal world. Emerson insists on the power of the spirit to build the world. Like the ancient philosopher in Genesis, he looks upon the world and finds it "very good." It is the acceptance of this concept which differentiates the American Transcendentalists from the Indian thinkers. The doctrine of the Over-Soul will be taken up in greater detail when other soures of philosophical mysticism have received further treatment.

One of the Oriental principles which attracted Emerson was that of Maya. There is a definite sense in which his own philosophy approximates this Indian concept. In his own thinking he called the doctrine Illusion. For him the Indian mind had treated the subject with the greatest catholicity. In the Journal of 1861, under the date of February 18, he writes as follows:

> The doctrine of the Imagination can only be rightly opened by treating it in connection with the subject of Illusions. And the Hindoos alone have treated this last with sufficient breadth in their legends of the successive Maias of Vishnu. With them youth, age, property, condition, events, persons, self are only successive Maias, through which mocks and instructs the soul. (12)

(12) Emerson, Journals, IX, pp. 302-3

A quotation from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad followed these sentences:

> When he sleeps, then becomes Purusha unmingled delight. No chariots are there, no horses, no roads; then he creates chariots, horses, roads; no pleasures are there, no tanks, no lakes, rivers; then he creates joys, tanks, lakes, rivers; for he is the agent.(13)

The importance of Maya, as it is reflected in Emerson's doctrine of illusions, requires additional consideration. The sole end of the Vedanta is to lead men to realize the Real. Because of man's finiteness the infinite is hidden through certain barriers. Matter is the veil, the Maya, through which men see only glimpses of the Beauty and Perfection which is God. God is not seen by the finite eyes; and it is an error on the part of man when he thinks that the ephemeral forms He assumes in the process of creation are real.

> The highest beatitude which the mystic can seek is the perfection of the spiritual sense which will enable him to see and know nothing but God as the Essence interpenetrating all matter. In the supreme moment of illumination the oneness of all subject and object, of substance and shadow, the relativity of all objects in the world, and the non-ultimate nature of oppositions is realized. In the words of St. Paul, "When that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away."(14)

Emerson was deeply touched by this belief. The essay Experience shows how it was inseparably a part of the entire man. After the death of his own son, he could say that affections, emotions,

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(13) Loc. cit.
(14) Christy, op. cit. p. 92

and persons were all set aside as illusions. "Grief too will make us idealists with the costly price of sons and lovers."(15) This sentence suggests that his deceased wife, Ellen Tucker, had become in a sense partly unreal. He continues, in the essay:

> In the death of my son, now more than two years ago, I seem to have lost a beautiful estate-- no more. I cannot get it nearer to me...it does not touch me; something which I fancied was part of me which could not be torn away without tearing me nor enlarged without enriching me, falls off from me and leaves no scar.(16)

The doctrine of Maya was expressed in the poetry of Emerson. The outstanding examples are the lines entitled Illusions and Maya. Probably Illusions was as little understood as Brahma when it first appeared. In the light of the doctrine of Maya, this and other similar poems become less difficult to interpret.

> Sleep is not, death is not;
> Who seem to die live.
> House you were born in,
> Friends of your spring-time,
> Old man and young maid,
> Day's toil and its guerdon,
> They are all vanishing,
> Fleeing to fables,
> Cannot be moored.
> See the stars through them,
> Through treacherous marbles,
> Know the stars yonder,
> The stars everlasting,
> Are fugitive also,
> And emulate, vaulted,
> The lambent heat lightning
> And fire-flys flight.

Maya, the title of the other short poem, is in itself

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(15) Emerson, Experience
(16) Emerson, Loc. cit.

significant. The lines have images and suggestions which an Indian might easily parallel from his own scriptures.

> Illusion works impenetrable,
> Weaving webs innumerable,
> Her gay pictures never fail,
> Crowd each other, veil on veil,
> Charmer who will be believed
> By man who thirsts to be deceived.
>
> Illusions like the tints of pearl,
> Or changing colors of the sky,
> Or ribbons of a dancing girl
> That mend her beauty to the eye.

Emerson was familiar with the Greek teaching of doctrines akin to Illusion. However, the Oriental writings gave him a terminology, poetic figures, and an insight that was agreeable to his nature.

It is the teaching of the Vedanta that Maya has no power over the liberated soul. The illusory appearance of the world remains after the mirage has been dispelled by true knowledge, but the liberated soul is no longer deceived. The emancipated man sets himself to the task of developing a logical cosmogony from the appearances.

The theory of emanation is not unique to the Vedanta. It is found in Neo-Platonism, some of the systems of Christian philosophers and German mystics. The cosmogony of Emerson must be similar to these, as it is neither Hebraic nor Aristotelian.

> "Ever fresh the broad creation,
> A divine improvisation,
> From the heart of God proceeds,"
> A single will, a million deeds. (17)

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(17) Emerson, Works, IX, 57-58

The thought in this passage can be explained only in the light of a theory of emanation from some Transcendent-Immanence that comprises all things.

> What are these thoughts we utter, but the reason of our incarnation. To utter these words we took flesh, missionaries of the everlasting Word which will be spoken. (18)

The consideration of the Vedanta doctrine Maya and Emerson's view of Illusions indicate that his own thinking seems to have paralleled the thinking of the Indian sages. There are traces of other systems and their beliefs in the illusory nature of existence in his writings, but to his mind the doctrine Maya seems to have had a greater appeal than the teaching of other systems.

The doctrine of Karma is that "a person's deeds determine his future lot." It is the Indian solution of the great riddle of the origin of suffering and the diversity of human conditions. Salvation for the Indian is deliverance from the power of Karma. Emerson's interest in Karma was related to his attitude toward fate. Karma is reflected in the Emersonian doctrine of Compensation.

Laymen and scholars have ridiculed and scoffed at the doctrine of Compensation. It has fared worse than any other tenet of Transcendentalism. Compensation and Karma are not identical. Emerson's law of Compensation seems to have had a native growth in his own mind. He gave a certain intellectual assent to the Indian doctrine, and practical expression to the Christian ethic.

In the Indian mind Karma is inseparable from the doctrine of Transmigration. This doctrine cannot be regarded as part of

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(18) Emerson, Journals, V, p. 533

Emerson's belief because, with advancing age, his belief in personal immortality at times seems to have waned as did his belief in a personal God. In the essay on Immortality he experiences difficulty in finding a place for personal immortality in his system. "I confess that everything connected with our personality fails. Nature never spares the individual."(19) At times his optimism and faith rise and he believes that "if it be best that conscious personal life shall continue, it will continue."(20) Toward the end, however, this impulse of personal faith fails him and he writes at one time as follows:

> ....individual body is the momentary arrest or fixation of certain atoms, which, after performing compulsory duty to this enchanted statue, are released again to flow in the currents of the world. An individual mind in like manner is a fixation or momentary eddy in which certain services and powers are taken up and minister in petty niches and localities and then, being released, return to the unbounded soul of the world. (21)

The fact that Emerson was brought up in a Christian atmosphere, educated for the ministry, and served for a time in that field, is sufficient evidence that Christianity influenced him. Near the close of his exposition of the Vedanta system Deussen says, "Christianity sees the essence of man in will, Brahmanism in knowledge..."(22) In this statement lies the differentiation of Emerson from the Vedantists. Knowledge for him was permeated with will.

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(19) Emerson, Works, VIII, pp. 342-43
(20) Ibid., VIII, p. 329
(21) Ibid., XII, p. 28.
(22) Deussen, op.cit. p. 403

This examination of the Indian philosophy as it is reflected in the writings of Emerson shows definitely that he did not accept the doctrines of that system in their totality. In the use he made of the doctrine of Karma there was considerable confusion of it with the Greek and Mohammedan teachings of fate. A. C. Christy's book, The Orient in American Transcendentalism, is a valuable contribution and shows evidence of extensive research in this field, but it is doubtful if he really presents a comprehensive treatment of the philosophy of India. In spite of the weakness of his treatment of the Vedanta system, the conclusion he reaches is sound:

> But to have shown that Emerson was preoccupied with Oriental thought and that he possessed certain temperamental affinities with it, is far from proving that he accepted the organized Vedanta system in toto. There was much in the system of which he remained ignorant. He took only that which he could accept and mix successfully with his inhibitions and preoccupations...That there is an Oriental reflection in his work is proof only of the fact that he had seen himself in Oriental literature, projected himself into it, used it as an illustration of his own theory of how to treat books and history, and from the foreign store, borrowed forms of expression. (23)

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> From the unreal lead me to the real!
> From darkness lead me to light!
> From death lead me to immortality! (24)

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(23) Op. cit. pp. 144-145
(24) Brihadaranyaka Upanishad I, iii, 28

CHAPTER II

PLATONIC AND NEO-PLATONIC SOURCES

II.

Platonic and Neo-Platonic Sources

> ...Mysticism has produced many masterpieces of literary art. It is sufficient to recall Plato's Phaedrus and Symposium, gems "of purest ray serene"; the Bhagavad Gita and the Fourth Gospel, bright particular stars in the firmament of literature; the Enneads of Plotinus, with their large and commanding rationality stirring the mind as well as the soul...The best mystical literature, moreover, with all its warmth and fervor, never offends the canons of good taste. It keeps the mental powers active, yet it never aims at this but secures it by an admirable indirection.*

The Christian religion, and for that matter the religion of the world, is deeply indebted to Plotinus. The estimate of his contribution varies among scholars, but they all assign his life and writings an important place in the history of religion. By a few he is ranked as one of the five or six greatest minds the world has ever produced. It is agreed by all that his contribution to Western Mysticism cannot be over-emphasized.

In the first chapter of this paper the philosophical mysticism of India was examined and an evaluation made of its place in Emerson's writings. This chapter will continue the same method, with reference to Neo-Platonism. As the name indicates, Neo-Platonism is a revival of Platonism. Before considering it further it may be helpful to make a brief examination of Platonism. There are three Platonic dialogues which deserve special mention so far as speculative mysticism is concerned. They are the Symposium, Phaedrus and Timaeus. Plato is remembered mainly as a prophet and religious

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* Buckham, John Wright, The Humanity of God, p. 115

teacher and it is through these dialogues we reach his mystical teachings. The Symposium appealed to Emerson and he remarked that it was a great day in anyone's life when he first read it. W. R. Inge presents Professor Stewart's outline of Platonism and remarks upon it as follows:

> Platonism is the mood of one who has a curious eye for the endless variety of this visible and temporal world, and a fine sense of its beauties, yet is haunted by the presence of an invisible and eternal world behind, or when the mood is more pressing, within the visible and temporal world, and sustaining both it and himself,--a world not perceived as external to himself, but inwardly lived by him, as that with which in moments of ecstacy, or even habitually, he is become one. This is how personal Platonism, whether in a Plotinus or in a Wordsworth may be described in outline.
>
> Platonism, however, is more than a "mood;" it is an attitude towards life founded on deep conviction--a practical philosophy of religion.(25)

It would be much easier to understand Plato if one could summarize his system but such an attempt leaves one in despair. There is a sense in which his writing is unintelligible until he is read as a mystic and prose-poet and one gives up hunting for a system in his writings.

Platonism concerns itself chiefly with God, Nature, and Beauty in their mystical meaning. The minds of Plato and his later followers were so overpowed by mystic rapture that in many cases they were driven to poetic expression. In describing this Inge says:

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(25) Inge, W.R., The Platonic Tradition in English Religious Thought, Longmans, Green and Co., New York, 1926, p. 73.

> And all through it is a genuine faith, a living interpretation of life, by which men have guided their conduct and moulded their thoughts. It is distinguished, among other things, by its deep love for the good and beautiful in the world, combined with a steady rejection of that same world whenever it threatens to conceal instead of revealing the unseen and eternal world behind. The Platonist loves Time, because it is the moving image of eternity; he loves Nature, because in Nature he perceives Spirit creating after its own likeness. As soon as the seen and unseen worlds fall apart and lose connection with each other, both are dead. Such a severence at once cuts the nerve which makes the Platonist a poet. So long as the angels of thought and vision can pass freely up and down the ladder which leads them from earth to heaven, poetry of the highest kind is implicit in Platonism, whether it finds utterance or not; but so soon as God is banished from the earth, and the beauty of form and color from heaven, both are surrendered to the formless infinite which for Plato and his disciples is the privation of goodness and reality. (26)

Neo-Platonism does rest upon the foundations of Plato but there is a sense in which the term is a misnomer. It is not exactly a genuine revival of Platonism. The greatness of Plato lay in his rationalistic idealism. The Neo-Platonists magnified the mystical elements in his doctrine and developedthem in combination with the philosophy of the East. It is an established fact that Plotinus was influenced by the Oriental philosophy and it is possible that Plato's writings reflect something of Eastern thought. In the case of Pythagoras, many scholars maintain that he borrowed from India his transmigration theory, the doctrine of five elements, the speculation regarding number, and various mythical speculations. From the time of

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(26) Inge, W.R. Ibid. p.82

Alexander's conquest of Northern India, there was considerable intercourse between Alexandria and India. Clement of Alexandria refers to the doctrines and usages of the Brahmins that he had learned from Hindus resident in Alexandria. Not only was Plotinus influenced by the Oriental philosophy in Alexandria, he also came into direct contact with the Indian mind by service in a military expedition with the Emperor Gordian. He teaches, in accord with the Orient, that the soul is free from suffering, and that it is in its essence light; and in order to explain the phenomena of consciousness he makes use of the Sankhyan illustration of the mirror in which the relfections of objects appear. He also teaches the Yoga doctrine that external impressions should be suppressed by contemplation, so that the highest knowledge may fill the mind in the form of a sudden ecstatic perception of God. Plotinus finds the world unsatisfying, not because it is the creation of the Evil One, but because it is transitory, imperfect and unreal. His system has been called dynamic pantheism, a description applicable to much of Indian theology which regards God as in Himself devoid of all qualities and yet the source of the forces which move the universe. Plotinus held that there were three stages of being, (1) pure thought or mind, (2) soul, and (3) matter.

For Plotinus neither moral good nor evil are ultimate: the highest principle, like Brahman, transcends both and is beyond good. The highest morality is a morality of inaction and detachment, happiness comes in the form of ecstasy and union with God. In human life the union is not permanent but rest for the weary soul is everlasting

after death, when the divine within us can return to the universal divine.

The important thing to remember about the philosophical mysticism of Plotinus is that it is a subjective philosophy founded upon scepticism. It had neither interest in, nor reliance upon, empirical knowledge. It has been called Neo-Platonism, but evidence has been offered to show that other elements are present--particularly the effect of Indian thought. Plotinus does go back to Plato for his metaphysics and for that reason his system can be spoken of as Neo-Platonism. Because of its highest object being the supra-rational, it must be a philosophy of revelation.

The doctrine of Plotinus is mysticism, and like all mysticism, it consists of two main divisions. First, the theoretical part deals with the high origin of the human soul, showing how it departed from its original s ate. Secondly, the practical part seeks to point out the way by which the soul in its aspiration reaches out beyond all sensible things, even beyond the world of ideas. It was previously stated that Plotinus held to three stages of being--pure thought or mind, soul and matter. The first is primeval Being, the One. It is the source of life, and therefore absolute causality and the only existence. It is the good and all finite things should return to it. From the original Being the nous emanates, which is an exact image of the One. The nous is the highest sphere accessible to the human mind, along with pure thought itself. The image and product of the motionless nous is the soul, which, according to Plotinus is, like the nous, immaterial. Its relation to the nous is the same

as that of the nous to the One. The nous is indivisible: the soul may preserve its unity and remain in the nous, but at the same time it has the power of uniting with the corporeal world and thus being disintegrated. Human souls which have descended into corporeality are those which have allowed themselves to be ensnared by sensuality and overpowered by lust. They must turn back from this; and, since they have not lost their freedom a conversion is still possible.

The practical aim of this philosophy is returning to the supreme God. By the practice of virtue, which aims at a likeness of God, the soul returns to itself, and continues in virtuous acts leading upward to God. By means of ascetic observances a man becomes once more a spiritual and enduring being, free from sin. This is preparatory to becoming "God." Through an ecstatic approach the soul may see God, the fountain of life, the source of being, the origin of all good, and the root of the soul. In that moment it enjoys the highest indescribable bliss; it is as if it were swallowed up of divinity, bathed in the light of eternity. According to Porphyry, on four occasions during the six years of their intercourse, Plotinus attained this ecstatic union with God.(27)

Emerson's introduction to Plato came through the work of Cudworth, a Cambridge Platonist, entitled The True Intellectual System of the Universe. Having caught the enthusiasm for Plato he began studying his works in the translation of Thomas Taylor (1758-1835), who gave a Neo-Platonic coloring to Plato's doctrines. The appre-

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(27) Harnack, Adolf, Neo-Platonism, Encyclopedia Britannica

ciation Emerson had for the philosopher-poet is reflected in his Journal of 1859, "Every man who would do anything well must come from a higher ground, and a philosopher must be much more than a philosopher. Plato is a Poet."(28) It is very likely that the Symposium suggested valuable ideas to Emerson for his essay on Beauty. In the Symposium one goes step by step from beauty to beauty until at last he beholds the Absolute Beauty. Beauty for Emerson expresses the cosmic and the divine, he aims at establishing the same intimate relation between beauty and deity as others have established between truth and deity or goodness and deity.

Emerson owes more to Plotinus than to Plato on the purely mystical side of his nature. He reread Taylor's selections from Plotinus annually, at least eighteen different times in his life. This influence is reflected in his essays, poems and Journals. His poem, Song of Nature, puts Plotinus in company with Jesus, Shakespeare and Plato:

> One in a Judean manger,
> And one by Avon's stream,
> One over against the mouths of Nile,
> And one in the Academe.

In the Journal of 1831, Emerson quotes from Plotinus and makes his own reflections as he does so. The passage is included at this point to illustrate Emerson's use of sources which appealed to him.

It is worth recording that Plotinussaid, "Of

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(28) Emerson, Journals, VII, p. 119

> the unity of God, nothing can be predicated, neither being, nor essence, nor life, for it is above all these." Grand it is to recognize the truth of this and of every one of that first class of truths which are necessary. Thus, "design must have a designer," "like can only be known by the same," out of which come the propositions in ethics, "si vis amari, ama," and "God without can only be known by God within," and "the scriptures can be explained only by that spirit which dictated them," and a thousand sayings more which have a quasi truth instantly to the ear, the real truth of which is this elementary fact in all, "like must know like." It would be well for every mind to collect with care every truth of this kind he may meet, and make a catalogue of "necessary truths." They are scanned and approved by the Reason far above the understanding. They are the last fact by which we approximate metaphysically to God. (29)

Emerson loved what Plotinus called "the calm grand air," the emphasis upon intuition, upon the direct perceptions of the mystical experience; the doctrine of the journey of the soul of man toward the Great Soul; the mysterious efficacy of lonely contemplation, and the faith that "nothing that truly is can ever perish."

In Taylor's translation of Plotinus, Emerson found this sentence: "This, therefore, is the life of the Gods, and of divine and happy men; a liberation from all terrene concerns, a life unaccompanied with human pleasures, and a flight of the alone to the alone." The last clause always remained with him and was quoted in his letters. It is echoed in the essay Over-Soul: "The soul gives itself alone, original and pure, to the Lonely, Original and Pure."

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(29) Emerson, Journals, II, p.358

Lastly it appears in the essay on Illusions, one of Emerson's most mature writings:

> There is no chance and no anarchy in the universe. All is system and graduation. Every god is sitting in his sphere. The young mortal enters the hall of the firmament; there is he alone with the alone, they pouring on him benedictions and gifts, and beckoning him up to their thrones. On the instant, and incessantly, fall snowstorms of illusions. He fancies himself in a vast crowd which sways this way and that and whose movement and doing he must obey; he fancies himself poor, orphaned, insignificant. The mad crowd drives hither and thither, now furiously commanding this thing to be done, now that. What is he that he should resist their will and think or act for himself? Every moment new changes and new showers of deceptions to baffle and distract him. And when, by and by, for an instant, the air clears and the cloud lifts a little, there are the gods still sitting around him on their thrones,--they alone with him alone.(30)

The conclusion reached at the end of Chapter I implied that the Vedanta philosophy supplied Emerson with literary figures and forms of expression. It seems that he also found in that system certain doctrines with which he agreed. After a survey of the Neo-Platonic doctrines the question is, "Was Emerson influenced by Plotinus, or as in the case of his interest in the Vedanta, did he find in Plotinus ideas with which his mystical nature agreed?" If the conclusion of Perry's study is correct, Emerson did have a decided interest in Plotinus and the essay on the Over-Soul doubtless reflects some Neo-Platonic influence.

> Indeed the whole object of the mystic quest is to Plotinus, as Dean Inge has said, "a state and

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(30) Emerson, Illusions, Quoted by Bliss Perry in the book Emerson Today, pp. 69-70

not a person. At no point in the ascent is God conceived as a Person over against our personality...The ineffable Godhead above God is of course supra-personal."

Emerson recognized all this, of course, but he was not troubled by it. If it affected his own theological thought at all it was probably a confirmation of a drift--or, if one prefers, a coincidence with a blind spot--in his own mind. What he admired in Plotinus was a tone of spiritual elevation...Without Neo-Platonism we should scarcely have had the essay on the Over-Soul or the poem on the World Soul and many another haunting passage in Emerson's prose and verse. (31)

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(31) Perry, Bliss, Emerson Today, Princeton University Press, Princeton, pp. 68-69

CHAPTER III

COLERIDGIAN SOURCES

III.

Coleridgian Sources

> He has a tone a little lower than greatness--
> but what a living soul, what a universal
> knowledge! *

In this portion of the paper there is a transition from the literature of antiquity to the life and writings of a man who was a contemporary of Emerson. The contribution of Samuel Taylor Coleridge both to his own day and to our own times has not been fully realized. There are evidences of a renewed interest in his work, and the excellent volume Coleridge as Philosopher, by Muirhead, has done a great deal toward a better understanding of his place in philosophy. A statement of his achievement as a religious philosopher appears at the close of Chapter Eight in Muirhead's volume, as follows:

> Returning to Coleridge's religious philosophy as a whole we may, after what has already been said of it, sum up in a word what may be taken to be its main achievement. This was to combine the Platonic theory of the world as an expression of the Divine Ideas, of reason as their reflection in our minds, and of religion as the wrapt contemplation of them, so reflected, on which the early English Platonists had mainly dwelt, with a voluntaristic theory of being and the knowledge of it, largely Kantian, finally with a psychology essentially his own. By shifting the emphasis from God as being or substance to God as Will, he was able to vindicate the practical nature of religion, which was later to become the keynote of the treatment of it by British and American idealistic writers, and to identify Faith and Fidelity to conscience and the identifications of the Will of God upon earth as rationally interpreted, instead of with belief in any system of doctrine. If, under the influence of the prevailing orthodox atmosphere in which he

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* Emerson, Journals, Vol. II, p. 277

> lived, his own morbid experience, and his conviction that the only alternative was a soul-deadening pantheism, he sought to add to this a reconstruction of orthodox Christian dogma, it only showed that, like perhaps both his masters, Plato and Kant, he was unaware of the full extent of the revolution in men's minds for which his own thought, more than that of any other writer of his time and nation, was the preparation.(32)

The attention of philosophers has been focused upon the development of New England Transcendentalism because of the Kantian revival. Emerson was the central figure in the Transcendentalist movement, and the name itself reflects a Kantian influence. His familiarity with the Kantian metaphysics was through the interpretation of Coleridge.

Emerson first mentions Coleridge in the Journal of 1826 where he makes an extensive criticism of his effort to produce a new type of poetry. Until 1829 he is silent in regard to Coleridge. It was in this year that he read Aids to Reflection and The Friend. The remarks he made at this time form the foundation of any effort to trace the influence of the English philosopher and critic. In 1833 Emerson traveled in Europe and met Coleridge but the visit proved to be disappointing. However, in 1834 he returned to The Friend and took up the study of the Biographia Literaria.

> As a result of his renewed interest in Coleridge, especially after Coleridge's death in July of 1834, Emerson mastered the distinctions upon which these books depend: the distinction between the Understanding and the Reason, between Talent

(32) Muirhead, John H. Coleridge as Philosopher, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1930, pp. 254-55.

and Genius, and between the Fancy and the Imagination.(33)

In 1836, ten years after Emerson began reading Coleridge, his book entitled Nature was published and the Transcendental Club was formed.

So far as Emerson is concerned it is necessary to trace his use of the kindred distinctions between the Understanding and Reason, between Talent and Genius, and between the Fancy and the Imagination. These three distinctions are much the same as the distinction between the each and the all, and from them spring the Transcendental reliance upon intuition. The fact that Emerson relied upon Coleridge for his interpretation of these distinctions comes out clearly when we realize that his conception of the function of intuition was that held by Coleridge rather than that taught by Kant.

Kant relates both intuition and imagination to the Understanding; but not so Coleridge. Coleridge saw clearly that there was a distinction between objective reality of the Platonic ideas and the subjective reality of the ideas of the Reason; these majestic ideas of God, Freedom, and Immortality. This is brought out in the distinction between the each and the all. The all is referred to the objective truth and derives its reality from the subjective truth of each. In much the same way Coleridge deals with the definition of an idea: "An idea conceived as subsisting in an object

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(33) Thompson, Frank T. Emerson's Indebtedness to Coleridge, Studiesin Philology, Volume 23, 1926, p. 56.
I shall follow Mr. Thompson's article in this chapter.

becomes a law: and a law contemplated subjectively in a mind is an idea."(34) Similarly, the Understanding, Talent and Fancy are attributes of the senses and deal with the objective world. Reason, Genius and Imagination are creative and deal with the subjective world.

These three distinctions lead to another point of view from which Emerson considered Coleridge. The distinction between the Understanding and the Reason may be looked upon as Coleridge's contribution to philosophy and metaphysics. The distinction between Talent and Genius is fundamental to an understanding of Coleridge as a psychologist. The distinction between the Fancy and the Imagination is the basis of his work as a literary critic.

Emerson's treatment of these three distinctions is clear, both in the Journals and in his lectures and essays covering the years 1834-44. The first to receive his consideration was the distinction between the Understanding and the Reason. The study began in 1834 and culminated in 1836 with the publication of Nature. The distinction between Talent and Genius was impressed upon Emerson's mind by the discussion of that subject at the second meeting of the Club. In a large measure The American Scholar grows out of this distinction. The first clear indication of Emerson's interest in the distinction between the Fancy and the Imagination is found in 1835. For the final word on this distinction by Emerson one must turn to the essay Intellect.

Emerson begins his study of Transcendental philosophy

(34) Coleridge, S.T. Aids to Reflection, p. 219

with a definite recognition of its value:

> Various terms are employed to indicate the counteraction of the Reason and the Understanding, with more or less precision, according to the cultivation of the speaker. A clear perception of it is the key to all theology of human life.(35)

One need not emphasize this statement of the importance of the distinction between the Understanding and the Reason were it not for the fact that both in The Friend and in the Aids to Reflection Coleridge has previously taken this position.

For a period of at least ten years Emerson seldom lost an opportunity to enforce his conception of the power of intuition by means of this distinction. There is a clear use of the distinction between the Understanding and the Reason in the Journal for April 1835:

> Why must always the philosopher mince his words and fatigue us with explanation? He speaks from the Reason, and being, of course, contradicted word for word by the Understanding, he stops like a cogwheel at every notch to explain. Let him say, I idealize, and let that be once for all; or, I sensualize, and then the Rationalist may stop his ears.(36)

Emerson shows that he fully understands that the Reason deals with the realm of ideas and that the Understanding deals with the external world through the senses. With this interpretation of the distinction we have the key to at least four of the seven divisions of Nature.

If Emerson had nothing more to say of the necessity of

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(35) Emerson, Journals, III, p. 467

catching his interpretation of the distinction between the Understanding and the Reason, either in Nature or in any of his other work during the years 1836-43, we must still conclude that this is the key to his Transcendental philosophy and theology. But in Idealism, which is closely related to the necessity of discipline, the same distinction is employed to answer his single inquiry: "Whether this end be not the Final Cause of the Universe; and whether nature outwardly exists."(37)

> To the senses and the unrenewed understanding, belongs a sort of instinctive belief in the absolute existence of nature. In their view man and nature are indissolubly joined. Things are ultimate, and they never look beyond their sphere. The presence of reason mars this faith. The first effort of thought tends to relax this despotism of the senses which binds us to nature as if we were a part of it, and shows us nature aloof, and as it were, afloat. Until this higher agency intervened, the animal eye sees, with wonderful accuracy, sharp outlines and colored surfaces. When the eye of Reason opens, to outline and surface are at once added grace and expression. These proceed from imagination and affection, and abate somewhat of the angular distinctness of objects. If the Reason be stimulated to more earnest vision, outlines and surfaces become transparent, and are no longer seen; causes and spirits are seen through them. The best moments of life are these delicious awakenings of the higher powers, and the reverential withdrawing of nature before its God.(38)

Nowhere does Emerson use the distinction between the Understanding and the Reason with more telling force. Nowhere does he come closer to a reconciliation of his Platonic and Transcen-

(37) Centenary Edition, I, p. 46
(38) Centenary Edition, I, pp. 49-50.

dental idealism. With Plato he still asserts that in the realm of ideas only may be found the true reality: "The best moments of life are these delicious awakenings of the higher powers, and the reverential withdrawing of nature before its God." But one surely must admit that at the dawn of the Transcendental mov ment in New England h reasserts the beliefs of his youth in the terms of Kant and Coleridge rather than those of his first great master. Furthermore, the realm of ideas of Plato is found to be, not in the objective world, but in the mind itself, where only is the true reality.

The fact that these Transcendentalists all seemed to have definite ideas in regard to these distinctions of Kant and Coleridge indicates that Emerson had been drinking deeply, in his three years of comparative solitude, from a common heritage. The prospect of indicating the influence of the Transcendental Club upon Emerson appears, for in The American Scholar Emerson must have felt that he was speaking for all that he felt to be true for himself. Since the distinction between Talent and Genius was stressed in this address, let us see to what extent Emerson had considered Coleridge's conception of the distinction and the kindred one between the Fancy and the Imagination previous to the formation of the Club.

In 1835, the year in which Emerson states that he fully understands what the philosopher means by the distinction between Talent and Genius and between the Fancy and the Imagination, on the thirteenth of August he asks,

> Who can read an analysis of the faculties by any acute psychologist like Coleridge, without becoming aware that this is proper study for him and that he must live ages to learn anything of so secular a science.(39)

The following day Emerson indicates that he was thoroughly familiar with the distinction between the Fancy and the Imagination given in the Biographia Literaria, for he adds,

> We would call up him who left half told
> The story of Cambuscan bold,
> But the great contemporary just now laid in the dust no man remembers; no man asks for him who broke off in the first sentences the Analysis of the Imagination, on the warning of a friend that the public would not read the chapter. No man asks, Where is the Chapter?(40)

A few days before, commenting upon Coleridge's treatment of the distinction between the Imagination and the Fancy, Emerson gave his conception of the distinction:

> The distinction of Fancy and Imagination seems to me to be a distinction in kind. The Fancy aggregates; the Imagination animates. The Fancy takes the world as it stands and selects pleasing groups by apparent relations. The Imagination is Vision, regards the world as symbolical and pierces the emblem for the real sense, sees all external objects as types.(41)

Coleridge differentiates between the primary Imagination and the secondary Imagination much as Kant differentiates between the productive and the non-productive Imagination. Coleridge says:

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(39) Emerson, Journals, III, p. 540
(40) Emerson, Journals, III, p. 540
(41) Emerson, Journals, III, pp. 525-26

> The primary Imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former....It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.(42)

The spirit of Coleridge's conception of the creative writer is reflected in those glowing lines in The American Scholar where Emerson writes:

> Genius looks forward: the eyes of man are set in his forehead, not in his hindhead: man hopes: genius creates. Whatever talents may be if the man create not, the pure efflux of the Deity is not his;---cinders and smoke there may be, but not yet flame.(43)

One finds in the essay Intellect a full development of the distinction that Coleridge was so careful to make between the primary and the secondary Imagination. In this essay he writes, "Every man's progress is through a succession of teachers each of whom seems at the time to have a superlative influence, but it at last gives place to a new."(44) To this one may add that here Emerson reveals the "superlative influence" of Coleridge before it had given "place to the new."

From first to last Intellect is permeated with such ideas

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(42) Coleridge, S.T. Biographia Literaria, pp. 177-78
(43) Centenary Edition, Volume I, p. 90
(44) Centenary Edition, Volume I, p. 343

as "constructive intellect," "representative intellect," "instinctive action," and "constructive powers." Almost the first sentence gives a distinction between the primary and the secondary Imagination: "Intellect lies behind genius, which is intellect constructive. Intellect is the simple power anterior to all action or construction."(45) But in what follows one may see even more unmistakably the influence of Coleridge.

> In the intellect constructive, which we popularly designate by the word Genius, we observe the same balance of two elements as in intellect receptive. The constructive intellect produces thoughts, sentences,poems, plans, designs, systems. It is the generation of the mind, the marriage of thought with nature.(46)

It must be evident that in distinguishing between intellect constructive and intellect reflective Emerson differs little from Coleridge's distinction between primary and secondary Imagination.

It would be an interesting study to consider the influence of Wordsworth and Carlyle upon Emerson. However, in view of the fact that Coleridge influenced these men before Emerson became acquainted with either of them, the writer feels that there will not be any necessity of examining their influence.

Coleridge meant more to Emerson than a mere transmitter of Kantian metaphysics. Coleridge felt that he had a system of philosophy of his own to present, and one is almost led to think that Emerson discovered it. It is possible that Coleridge came to Emerson as he came to Wordsworth and opened the springs of his intellectual being.

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(45) Centenary Edition, II, p. 325
(46) Centenary Edition, II, 334-35

CHAPTER IV

EMERSON'S PHILOSOPHICAL MYSTICISM

IV.

Emerson's Philosophical Mysticism

The Vedanta philosophy has been called a growth or development rather than a system. Dean Inge says that if one expects to get much out of the writings of Plato he must give up the idea of looking for a system. In the case of Coleridge it is perhaps unfair to overemphasize a system to the exclusion of the man himself. When one stops to consider the personalities of these great men and the contributions they have made to human progress, it must be admitted that any man is greater than his system.

The purpose of this study has been to examine some of the ideas with which Emerson had familiarized himself, in order to determine whether or not he was influenced by them. Cabot says that it is useless to attempt to trace the influences exerted upon Emerson. If he meant an exhaustive study of all the influences exert d upon Emerson perhaps one would agree with Cabot. However, there were certain writings Emerson found which were in agreement with his own mystical nature, and he reflects them in his literary productions. In other words, he found himself in the literature of other great men.

So far no one has ever written a volume on the philosophy or mysticism of Emerson. There have been some articles appearing from time to time and more recently a number of books have been written. Dr. John Wright Buckham's lecture entitled Emerson: America's Poet-Philosopher is perhaps the outstanding treatment of Emerson from a mystical viewpoint. O. W. Firkins devotes a

chapter to Emerson's Philosophy in his book Ralph Waldo Emerson. It is a scholarly and comprehensive study, but there is not much in it which bears directly on the subject of this paper.

In the light of the uncertainty of a system of philosophical mysticism in the sources Emerson used, it is not an easy task to arbitrarily say whether or not he had any system. It is certain he did not emphasize a system to the extent of seeking to gain a following of disciples. Perhaps it is enough to say that there were some basic principles which attracted Emerson's interest and that by his creative genius he enlarged and enriched their meaning.

Christy says, "His writings do not contain an expanded and finished exposition of a complete system. Instead he wrote informal essays and verse, possibly the very reason why he was so successful in influencing the instinctive idealism of the rank and file of American life in his time."(47) Even though he did not have an "expanded and finished system," surely there are some signs that point the way to a better understanding of his spiritual development. O. B. Frothingham offers two articles of faith as the primary ideas of Emerson's philosophy.

> The first article in Mr. Emerson's faith is the primacy of Mind. That Mind is supreme, eternal, absolute, one, manifold, subtle, living, immanent in all things, permanent, flowing, self-manifesting; that the universe is the result of mind, that nature is the symbol of mind; that finite minds live and act

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(47) Christy, op.cit., p. 183

> through concurrence with this infinite mind. This idea recurs with such frequency that, but for Emerson's wealth of observation, reading, wit, mental variety and buoyancy, his talent for illustration, gift at describing details, it would weary the reader. As it is, we delight to follow the guide through the labyrinth of his expositions, and gaze on the wonderful phantasmagoria that he exhibits.
>
> His second article is the connection of the individual intellect with the primal mind, and its ability to draw thence wisdom, will, virtue, prudence, heroism, all active and passive qualities. This belief, as being more practical, has even more exuberant expression than the other.(48)

In the mind one finds the avenue to Emerson, but the secret of Emerson may be conveyed in one word: the superlative, even the superhuman, vlue which he found in the unit of experience, the direct, momentary, individual act of consciousness. This is the center from which the man radiates; it begets all and explains all. He may be defined as an experiment made by nature in raising the single perception or impression to a hitherto unimaginable value. This rare power to make high possibilities clear and near rested on two perfectly definable propositions: First, the absolute dependence of all things on the state of the human spirit; second, the power of that spirit to make instinct, unlimited, and what he called total advances.

What will happen when these three factors unite: First, an extraordinary wide and various aggregate of perceptions and thoughts; second, a profound sense of the oneness of all things;

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(48) Frothingham, O.B. Transcendentalism in New England, G.P. Putnam Sons, New York, 1876.

third, a passionate and eager delight in the detection of resemblance? There will result a religion which shall be both an occupation and an entertainment, and a philosophy in which identity shall be exalted. No man ever breathed, possibly, who found more pleasure than Emerson in the disclosure of hidden likeness, and this is because no man living was ever more sensitive to the pungency of surface difference. We can do no justice to identity by remembering it all the time; we can appreciate its force only by alternately forgetting and recalling it. It was the vividness of cognition in Emerson, the interest in the countless particulars for their own sake, that gave dramatic incisiveness and unrivalled force to the ensuing recognition. To the apostle of the single experience, process was far more stirring than result, and, in the leap from one thought to its cognate, he attained perhaps his deepest realization of the unfathomed significance of nature. His progress seemed to follow, not the radius, but the chord; in plainer language, he did not so much reach the center by actual passage from the circumference as he felt or assumed it in his movements from one point to another. The tracking of a fact or idea through its multiplying disguises became the keenest of intellectual pleasures; it combined the solemnity of worship with the zest of sport.

Emerson's religion was a self-supporting enterprise, not a hoard, but capital-employed and supplying dividends far more punctually than his precarious investments in bank stocks or railways. The business, however, was of that not unusual kind which only large initial outlay could have rendered lucrative. The lesson

to the penniless is clear. The peculiarity of Emerson might be defined in these terms: he brought into the service of the religious instinct a larger amount and greater verity of material than was ever applied to that function by any other of the sons of men. He is supreme in the magnitude of his resources. To make an Emerson, piety had to be raised to an unexemplified intensity under the nurture of auspicious Christian dispensation, and transferred in undiminished fullness to the forms of divinity supplied by the broad cosmos. Piety of a kind is discernable in the religious attitude of Plato and Plotinus, who evolved their cosmic diety from their private feeling and intelligence; but its flame is slender beside the Emersonian blaze.

> There are four immemorial routes of human aspiration, definable for us still under the ancient names of beauty, truth, virtue, and God. The pursuits correlative with these ends are known as art, science, morality and religion. A man fitted to raise experience to its highest power must be profoundly responsive to all four appeals--a proposition which is verified in Emerson. No man can answer for mankind as to which of these is primary. In the case of Emerson, due to his background, religion is primary and authoritative. The originality of Emerson may be said to lie in the fact that the same intimacy of relation which the consent of mankind has established between Deity and ethics, he proceeded to set up between Deity and truth, between Deity and beauty.(49)

No matter what Emerson's interest might have been in books he had a much greater interest in nature. It is the theme constantly recurring in all his writings. Nature is not defined by him and

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(49) Firkins, O.W., Ralph Waldo Emerson, Houghton Mifflin Co., New York, 1915

and it would require a lengthy study of all his writings to determine what he means by it. In his first volume, Nature, published in 1836, he designates Nature as "the integrity of impression made by manifold natural objects." His interest in and devotion to Nature is not to escape humanity but only to remove himself from human waywardness and frailty. For Emerson Nature is implicitly moral. Like the philosopher who wrote in Genesis, he too looks on and says of Nature that "it is very good." Being a poet-philosopher and nature mystic he would not be expected to have the interests of those who approach nature by a purely scientific method.

With all due respect for the high place Emerson has given Nature, we must recognize that he has given a more important place to Spirit. His philosophical mysticism has its completest expression in the essay the Over-Soul. The essay has been rightly called a spiritual hymn to the Deity. The Over-Soul is a Transcendent Something above nature and the soul. "Man is a stream whose source is hidden. Our being is descending into us from we know not whence... I desire and look up, and put myself in the attitude of reception, but from some alien energy the visions come." The Over-Soul is the soul of the whole; it is the One. "Within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related, the eternal One."

Later he calls the One "the Supreme Mind," "the Maker of all things and persons," "God." The Over-Soul and the soul of the individual are most intimately related. "Ineffable is the union of man and God in every act of the soul. The simplest person who

in his integrity worships God, becomes God; yet forever the influx of this better and universal self is new and unsearchable." "The soul becomes God" is probably an expression of a mystical feeling which the language fails to render adequately. The mystic may feel that he "becomes God" but he knows as soon as he says so he defeats his purpose and interrupts his mystical rapture. It is the presence of the One as all-sufficient that he is trying to express. "He that finds God a sweet enveloping thought to him, never courts company. When I sit in that Presence, who shall dare to come in?" Here he reminds one of Plotinus, for with all the Presence implies there is an element of the super-personal in this relationship.

> The soul gives itself, alone, original and pure to the Lonely, Original, and Pure, who on that condition, gladly inhabits, leads, and speaks through it...Behold, it saith, I am born into the great, the universal mind. I, the imperfect, adore my own Perfect. I am somehow receptive of the great soul, and thereby I do overlook the sun and the stars, and feel them to be the fair accidents and effects which change and pass.

There are those who think Emerson believed in Pantheism. If he did hold to it at a stage of his mental and spiritual growth he did not always retain it. It is true he had no fear of Pantheism and that he did not make a special effort to affirm or deny the doctrine. The Over-Soul is probably one of the best examples of philosophical mysticism and it quite definitely is of the Neo-Platonic type, clam, contemplative, and rational. The spiritual and transcendental quality of Emerson's mysticism is too marked in this essay to call it Pantheism.

In the Essays there is no rigid or uniform conception of

God. It is almost certain that he did not think of God as personal, especially in the sense the term is used today. "That Emerson thought of God fully and predominantly as a Person seems hardly compatible with his writings as a whole. His 'Deity is vague and uncertain in personality', wrote Dr. Gordon."(50)

Emerson's appreciation and interpretation of the religious attitudes of other peoples and civilizations is a contribution which offers an inspiration and a challenge to the modern student of comparative religions. Dr. Buckham says, "Emerson had a mind discerning and hospitable enough to comprehend, as few Occidentals have done, the meaning and interest of Oriental thought." It is a fitting tribute to his genius that Indian students have called him a Brahman born away from home. In the light of the many other influences exerted upon Emerson, plus his own originality, it is difficult to estimate the extent of any particular influence, especially that of a culture so alien to us as that of India. The writer has found that Emerson's interest in India came at a later period of his life. In youth Emerson was a student and admirer of Plato. However, the translation he used was of a Neo-Platonic cast. Later he became absorbed in the philosophy of Coleridge and the activities of the Transcendental Club. The volume Nature might be considered the culmination of his reflections and meditations after having studied Coleridge. It was in the period following that he gave so much attention to the writings of India. The extent of Indian, Neo-

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(50) Buckham, John Wright, op.cit., p. 131

Platonic and Coleridgian influence may be understood better in the light of Emerson's estimate of Christ.

Emerson was brought up in the atmosphere of a Christian home and for several generations his forefathers had been clergymen. Following the tradition he also studied fo and began a career in the ministry. After a short time he gave up his ministerial career because of loyalty to his own convictions and this might in part reflect his inadequate evaluation of Christ. But Emerson was a mystic, so it seems that he would have a profound interest in one of the greatest mystics who ever lived. We have seen that Emerson gives an important place to Mind, sometimes almost if not altogether using Mind and God as synonymous terms. It is understood that one must use his mind to understand Christ but there must be something more. The heart must also enter in and man must feel the presence of Christ as an abiding part of his very nature. Perhaps Emerson lacked this feeling, or if he had it he failed to allow it sufficient importance. We have seen that Emerson lacked the conception of God as Person and this is probably the key to his inability to adequately evaluate and interpret Christ. Whatever Christ stands for in the lives of men, surely He must be interpreted as the revelation of God as Person. In other words, Christ must be the personification of God as the Supreme Person. Again Emerson was "a consistent and persistent intuitionist." In his search for God and the emphasis of the unity of all living, perhaps Emerson wanted the direct contact, without any form of intermediary, such as he might have found in Christ.

Thus in his effort to find God, as he conceived Him in his own experience, Emerson turned to the literature of all ages trying to find himself in the pages of those who had found God before him. Those of us who read and study Emerson are at times prone to take much of what he says with a grain of salt. He seems to have an optimism that is out of proportion to life as we see it and live it. He is so much concerned with the more spiritual things of life that at times he seems to forget life as it is with all its routine and evil. Yet life was not easy for Emerson and for many his lot would have been too much to bear. He suffered the loss of loved ones, helped support his family, and gave up a career. What father could fail to weep for the loss of a little son who would kneel down and kiss the violets? Emerson seems to have met the complete range of emotional feeling, from the most exhilarating joy to the depth of despair and his philosophy seems to have been adequate to maintain an equilibrium. Another indication of the adequacy of Emerson's philosophy for himself is revealed by the harmony of a memorable old age. "With maturity the rough edges of his dominant principles were softened and the sharp emphasis of his earlier utterances were blended in rich harmonic tones."

The genius of Emerson is not adequately accounted for in the light of the sources of his philosophical mysticism. Heredity and environment do not account for genius, much less the analysis of the creative productions of the mind. There is something more that must be taken into account; genius has about it that quality which indicates that it must be a fresh breath from God.

This examination of sources of philosophical mysticism in the writings of Emerson is by no means complete. It has been the purpose of the writer to trace what he believes to be the most important sources and to evaluate them in the light of Emerson's genius in the field of letters. No doubt opinion varies as to the degree to which Emerson was influenced by the sources he used. Regardless of what scholars might say about the extent of these influences, it must be admitted that he did not use them as an end in themselves. Rather he used them as a means to an end. That end seems to have been the cultivation of his spirit in order to find a deeper and richer meaning in all of life. It may be said in conclusion that Emerson's contribution to philosophical mysticism was the endeavor to interpret all of life as having a significant spiritual meaning.

Those of us who commit ourselves to living the spiritual life in such a time as this can profit by drinking deeply at the overflowing spring of the Spirit if we take time to turn to the Over-Soul and Nature. It is in these two essays we find the philosophical mysticism of Emerson most completely expressed.

> We know the truth when we see it, from opinion, as we know when we are awake that we are awake.

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(51) Emerson, The Over-Soul

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THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN CLASSES FOR THE DIVISION OF WEALTH

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"THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN CLASSES FOR THE DIVISION OF WEALTH"

INTRODUCTION

In this section, termed "Introduction," I have attempted to show the "psychological factors" as well as the "physiological factors" which, in a normal human being, stimulate the "rational" and "emotional" sections of his nervous system. Inasmuch as man is a part of a social or gregarious species, a "social" stimulus acts on him differently from other stimuli. The long history of man's painful groping after security and happiness shows how precarious were even the most exceptional powers of natural judgment witnout the "social heritage of accumulated and transmitted knowledge, inventions, and ideals. After aeons of experience, man came to recognize that his imagination kept him always one step ahead of his observations; his judgment told him where that step should lie; energy spurred him on and the shrewdest common sense held him back from unsafe conclusions. See Page I

THE ART OF JUDGMENT

After man had decided to honor the "art of judgment" by giving quarters to the "judges," he had to learn to discriminate; to demand from every thoughtful citizen the formation and cultivation of the habit of deliberate moral choice. For the production of this habit, he relied on the education of both thought and feeling, dwelling on the special importance of the social instincts and, in particular, of the "affection" felt for the state by its members. The right of private judgment was won by argument until the Latin Catholic authorities made the grievous mistake of emphasizing the conclusions

arrived at, dogmatizing rather than stressing the "method" by which those conclusions were to be formed. It remained for the Reformers to restore the right of private judgment. See Page 9.

MEDIEVAL BACKGROUND
(Class Struggle)

With the authority of "dogma" accepted by the people, the facts of class status and inequality were rationalized in the Middle Ages by a functional theory of society. Each member had its own function, prayer or defense, or merchandise, or tilling the soil. This was workable so long as the wealth of the Medieval aristocracy was associated with the land, while that of industrial capitalists with "particular" enterprises; both had tangible form and definite habitation. When capitalist fortunes became liquid, mobile, intangible, in other words, a mass of paper rights to ownership, a revolution ensued. It remained for Calvin to sanctify or baptize the fruits of the Industrial Revolution. See Page 16.

MODERN THOUGHT ON THE SUBJECT

With the concentration of wealth and force in the new National States of Europe by the rise of oceanic trade, and by the passions of commercial wars, social thought was influenced by the "virtues" and vices of speculation, avarice, fear, pity, and acquisitiveness. Justification of the change of affairs was attempted by such people as Locke, Hartley, Bentham, the Mills, Ricardo, Malthus, and others, but the treatises of the opponents of these men remained as dusty and forgotten pamphlets to be rediscovered a third of a century later by Karl Marx in the British Museum and collected by university librarians today. (Reference, "Capital," by Karl Marx). See Page 21.

CLASSES AND CLASS STRUGGLE

It is a part of the economic interpretation of history to hold that, since the dissolution of primitive society, social processes have inevitably grouped men in economic classes. It is the diversity and antagonism of kinds of interest and function that determine class divisions. The units of a class may be engaged in a great diversity of occupations, yet the general vocational class or the great mass of fathers and sons remains the same. Even in America, despite its comparatively brief history, its less regular economic conditions, and its constant influx of immigrants, the evidences of class heredity are abundant. Out of class interest and function develops class instinct, habit-reflexes. However, it must not be thought that because class instinct and class feeling are developed, they necessarily develop class consciousness. The consciousness of class follows haltingly and tardily the instinct of class interests. The cause of class hatred, a further development, lies in the relation that one class sustains to another and only by thoroughly recognizing the character and causes of class divisions, can the material factors compelling those divisions be abolished, and the ground be prepared for a complete and abiding social unity. The beliefs which a class holds, as a result of its economic relations, are generally sincere beliefs though partial and imperfect and have little to do with absolute ethics. These beliefs are nevertheless generally very sincere. The unequal distribution of income and wealth renders absurd all capitalist society's pretentions to democracy and equality. Even technologists cannot remedy the situation,as technology is not providing plenty for all despite the weird assertions made by them. See Page 25.

CONCLUSION

Revolution has played a decisive part in American development. The laboring man seems destined to be the ruler of the future. We may take it for granted that revolution, even violent revolution (not simply mental revolutions), will occur periodically for a long time to come. Everyone is unanimous in recognizing that revolutions are not in essence anything but political radicalism. However, political radicalism is not an original attitude; it is rather a consequence. In the view of the revolutionary, the value of the law is pre-existent to its suitability to life. The revolutionary era ends very simply, without phrases or gestures, in re-absorption by a new sensibility. To the political philosophy of ideas succeeds a political philosophy of concrete phenomena and men. See Page 49.

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